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QUESTION OF THE REALIZATION IN ALL COUNTRIES OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS CONTAINED IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND IN THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, AND STUDY OF SPECIAL PROBLEMS WHICH THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FACE IN THEIR EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE THESE HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING: PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE RIGHT TO ENJOY AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING; FOREIGN DEBT, ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENT POLICIES AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THE FULL ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND, IN PARTICULAR, ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

Written statement submitted by the International Movement ATD Fourth World, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category I)

The Secretary-General has received the following communication, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[11 January 1992]

What is the fate of the poorest of the poor throughout the world?

1. Support for fledgling democracies, the promotion of a new world political and economic order, the opening-up towards the East: all hold out promise for those who defend human rights. However, entire populations are currently

suffering the deprivation, uncertainty and violence engendered by these profound upheavals. Elsewhere, in various parts of the world, others suffer the onslaught of epidemics, famine, exoduses, of warfare and its painful aftermath.

2. Against such a background, it hardly seems reasonable to call attention yet again to the poorest of the poor and to their plea for help. The times would seem more suited to a general mobilization on behalf of those who are threatened by these scourges or have already fallen prey to them and to support those striving to rebuild their countries. However, individuals and small grass-roots NGOs everywhere can testify that the poorest families are the ones most afflicted by the results of these tragic circumstances. They can testify to the neglect and the unbearable conditions in which these families live or survive.

3. The international community can no longer ignore this. It can, for example, no longer ignore the breakdown in solidarity with the poorest members of the population in those countries where shortages have become too great. The bitter struggle for survival divides populations. The strongest fall back on themselves, while the poor manage as best they can, but in spite of superhuman efforts to provide for their own, the extremely poor seem to depend on all the others and feel more than ever despised and rejected.

4. Nor is it possible for the international community to forget that, even in the industrialized countries, too much insecurity causes entire families and population groups to remain cut off or to slide into extreme poverty, where they are beyond the reach of rights or responsibilities. Men, women and children see the family break up from destitution, undergo the humiliation of soup kitchens, and young people are forced into unemployment by illiteracy and lack of training.

5. The consequences of the suffering inflicted on these men and women, these young people and children, will leave deep scars in their very being.

<u>The poorest still struggle on alone</u>

6. In such extreme circumstances, they carry on the struggle to survive, to keep the flame of hope alive. And in these very same circumstances, they expect to be treated as human beings, in the fullest sense.

7. In one extremely poor region, which received no assistance from outside, a women said: "The worse thing is that my children see their mother, who has always struggled to make ends meet, begging." When you can speak only of your material expectations, when you can only look on yourself as a beggar, it is as soul destroying as being without the barest minimum in life.

8. The indivisibility of human rights is a fact and a demand clearly expressed by the poorest families, even when the pressing need to achieve one's economic rights would seem to leave no room for any other worries.

With whom do we share the years of hardship as well as the years of respite?

9. The founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, Father Joseph Wresinski has taught us, along with the poorest, to ask ourselves this question at all times. Should we not always and everywhere put the families and the voiceless groups of people broken by poverty at the very centre of our common concern? What place will be found for these people - the ones who will have paid the heaviest price for the changes and the scourges - when development and reconstruction begin again? The international community now faces this critical question. The history of the industrialized countries has taught us that those who are marginalized in times of hardship are likely to remain marginalized when growth resumes. However, this is not inevitable. The international community is capable of developing an understanding of the ways and means needed to make sure that the poorest can become partners in change, and thus guarantee that real headway is made in human rights.

Appreciation and recognition for the poorest as defenders of human rights

10. In their day-to-day struggle to avoid being utterly crushed, the men, women, young people and children in these sectors of the population defend everyone's basic rights. They reveal everyone's essential aim; to safeguard one's dignity. Refusal to accept destitution lies behind their daily acts, acts that are frequently misunderstood and cannot protect them from the burden of being kept on the outside until they die.

11. Father Joseph Wresinski showed us that this refusal by the poorest, and by those who stand alongside them, to accept their fate, is based on the profound conviction that every human being is entitled to hold responsibility, and the means to shoulder it, for the common good. Hence we consider every human being as inseparable from his fellows, an integral part of an indivisible mankind which cannot do without the participation and contribution of its poorest members. Without their participation, how would mankind achieve the ideals of democracy and human rights it has set for itself?

Getting through to the poorest and letting them get through to us

12. In the eyes of Father Joseph Wresinski, getting through to the poorest was not merely a matter of counting them, of determining their geographical or social position, at the risk of providing them with programmes or with assistance thought up by others, often for people better off than they. It meant far more: appreciating their capacity to contribute the fruits of their experience and their thoughts to the society they live in, and particularly their ability to take a fresh look at human rights and their essential indivisibility. It also meant making them the first partners in human rights programmes.

13. This approach to "getting through to the poorest and letting them get through to us" is both political and human. It is above all global, and poses the question of extreme poverty in terms of the violation of human rights as a whole. At one and the same time it brings together:

Knowledge gained with and by the poorest themselves, not only of their living conditions, but also of their aspirations, their thoughts and their experience;

A new and original experience of a partnership with those rejected by society;

Measures implemented not only in the field, but at a political level.

The study "Human rights and extreme poverty": a positive step for human rights

14. This determination to acquire direct knowledge of the poorest and thus turn them into the leading partners of the study "Human rights and extreme poverty" was made clear by the Commission on Human Rights in resolution 1991/14. By giving an opportunity to speak to the people who have never been consulted in their own right, this study will be a positive step for human rights. The Commission thus responds to the expectations of the poorest for recognition as human beings and for their efforts to reject poverty, not only for themselves, but for others.

15. Accordingly, the Commission on Human Rights should ensure that this innovative investigative approach is maintained throughout the study. In order to acquire a thorough grasp of how individuals and families trapped by poverty actually live, without running the risk of destabilizing them or jeopardizing them, it is essential to conduct the study with great discretion and caution. Neither the identity, the whereabouts or even the country in which the people live should be mentioned; the methodology as a whole should be designed to develop a deeper understanding, and not to level accusations. In the NGO Fourth World Committee, several international NGOs have already committed themselves to this approach, in conjunction with their members in the field.

16. The International Movement ADT-Fourth World therefore, requests the Commission on Human Rights:

To continue to foster a proper awareness, with the participation of the poorest, by preserving the originality of the approach used in the study "Human rights and extreme poverty" and by requesting the Sub-Commission to consider the study as a matter of priority and to appoint, at its forthcoming session, a rapporteur to complete it;

To ensure that an initial document under this study is available to place the issue of extreme poverty on the agenda of the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, so that the Conference can assess the effectiveness of international human rights instruments in the light of the actual experience of the poorest, as conveyed by the poorest themselves or by the NGOs who stand alongside them or who represent them;

To ensure that United Nations emergency measures and development programmes take account of the indivisible nature of human rights, and thus respond to the expectation expressed by the poorest that they will be regarded as human beings in the fullest sense, even in circumstances of utter destitution.